

TENANT REGULATORY PANEL
SHELTERED HOUSING REVIEW OF SERVICE STANDARDS 2019
REPORT

TENANT REGULATORY PANEL (TRP) MEMBERS

Panel Chair: Val Rogacs
Panel Members: Angie Hutton
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BACKGROUND

In 2014/15 the TRP carried out an extensive review of the service standards applied to all Uttlesford District Council's (UDC) sheltered housing schemes. The main objective of this review was to ensure residents fully understood the standards and that they were receiving the services and promises made by UDC to sheltered housing residents.

The TRP spoke with UDC officers to make sure they fully understood the principles introduced by UDC and how the day-to-day management structure operated.

Following the review, a detailed report was prepared making a number of recommendations where the service could be improved for the benefit of the sheltered housing residents.

2019 REVIEW

As that report is now four years old, the TRP decided to review the recommendations. They spoke to UDC officers who manage the day to day service and, using the recommendations in the earlier report, prepared a list of spot checks and questions to ask the sheltered housing residents. The questions and responses are detailed later in this report.

OBJECTIVES

In view of the TRP's limited resources, it was decided to scrutinise some of the schemes based on the number of residents who had taken part in the original review, rather than review all the schemes. Those chosen were Alan Hasler House and Alexia House Great Dunmow, Priors Wood Court Takeley, Four Acres Saffron Walden and The Close, Broomfields Hatfield Heath.

ACTIONS TAKEN

Meeting with Fergus Simmonds, Sheltered Housing Team Leader, to discuss the project and any issues of safeguarding and confidentiality in relation to the residents.

A questionnaire was developed based on the recommendations in the original report.

The five schemes were identified based on the criteria set out above.

Individual letters of introduction were sent to the residents of all five schemes inviting them to attend a meeting or, if they preferred to speak privately to TRP members, to arrange separate meetings.

All members of the TRP visited at least one scheme and carried out spot checks where required and completed the questionnaires.

The responses were collated and scrutinised.

QUESTIONNAIRE DATA (Extracted from original report)

Q1 **Service Standards** - spot check that these are displayed on noticeboards. Check with residents if they are aware these are also available in the Tenants' Handbook

Q2 **Kept Fully Informed** - Check with residents that they are invited to regular meetings and receive quarterly newsletters

Q3 **Safe from Abuse** - Safety of the facility - spot check external doors have intruder alarms which activate properly and that doors are not left ajar. Faults reported with 4-hour response and residents fully aware of the procedure

Q4 **Treated fairly** - this related to repairs issues so did not form part of the review

Q5 **Independence of choice** - did residents take part in the 2018 Customer Satisfaction Survey (providing they were resident at the time). If not check why. Are the results of the Survey on noticeboards? If residents requested a visit regarding a specific matter, did this happen?

Q6 **Swift response** - again this related to repairs issues so did not form part of the review

Q7 **Out of hours response** - have residents used this facility recently? Did a family member respond or someone else? Details of first contacts should be in the support plan. Are residents aware of this?

Q8 **Level of care received** - there is now only one level of care and families are involved but resident can opt out

Q9 **Opportunities** - is social inclusion encouraged. Do all residents get a copy of newsletters, What's On Where etc.

Q10 **Agreed support plan** - were residents offered a copy of this? If so, do they still have it? If not, are they aware that the document is held securely at the facility? (Note - UDC's current system is not able to cope with providing copies for all residents)

Q11 **Emergency calls** - key performance indicators (KPIs) are sent from Carecall to Fergus Simmonds and information should be on noticeboards. TRP suggested including details in an annual newsletter.

Q12 **Timely response to calls** - officers review monthly KPIs but family often respond quicker than Care Call so check with residents

Additional Questions

Literature published by UDC - is this in plain English and easily understandable

Noticeboards - check at least one in each scheme, easily accessed by all residents who are able

Parking - are there any issues with car parking. Can residents and families easily park. If so, what action, if any, can be taken to resolve this

Landscaping - are there any issues with landscaping such as unsightly walls which could perhaps be shielded by planting

Service charges - check if residents receive a detailed summary of all items covered by service charges in their scheme

Smoking - are there any issues with smoking in communal areas. If complaints have been made, have they been dealt with adequately or appropriately

Independent person for residents - apart from family members, are residents aware of any other independent person who could assist them when dealing with UDC staff

Laundry facilities - are these adequate. If not, have complaints been made and have repairs been carried out or advice given when equipment is out of order

Window cleaning - is this taking place and satisfactory. If not are any complaints dealt with promptly. If window cleaning not supplied, how do residents manage.

Schemes Visited

Four Acres, Saffron Walden

The visiting TRP member inspected notice boards and confirmed that a copy of the service standards handbook was displayed. However, no copy of the results of the Customer Satisfaction survey could be found.

FS Response: These were displayed on the notice board on the lounge door. I checked before your visits and have since checked again.

Residents are kept informed by information on noticeboards along with regular meetings and newsletters.

External doors are locked at 3.00pm. After which they can be accessed by fob. If external doors are left open/ajar no intruder alarms are set off and residents reported that the ground floor external door does not shut properly. Also there was an issue with a smoke alarm going off at regular intervals in one of the flats.

FS Response: External doors are locked at 1pm. Due to the layout of Four Acres and the fact we have 9 separate blocks having intruder alarms in place would not be feasible. Doors do become faulty as do smoke alarms but these are reported to repairs as soon as staff are aware.

The residents reported that out of hours responses are quite quick, but some would prefer to opt out of the care scheme.

FS Response: This is not an option and as part of living in sheltered accommodation this is what they agree to and forms part of the Sheltered Service Standards.

Further feedback: FS confirmed direct contact with all tenants could be made to increase security controls but is not currently done so. He confirmed most residents chose to opt out of the care scheme.

Some residents expressed an interest in having things like computer training which could possibly take place in the common room, as well as social events.

FS Response: Computer training was offered previously with little interest. We will put this to the residents again.

Further feedback: FS advised he did not have the resources to offer any other form of training or activity support (i.e. flower arranging). He suggested that SH Officers could sign-post residents to such activities which the group agreed to. He confirmed that social events need to be driven by residents, not council officers. He also advised the W.O.W. magazine is used to advertise events like these and is widely available to all residents.

There were also complaints that the newsletters contained religious views which they felt was inappropriate.

FS response: The newsletter is not produced by UDC but by a resident at Four Acres and we have no influence over it.

Residents had no complaints about emergency calls but were not aware these were reported as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Parking as with most of the other schemes visited, there are problems, particularly unauthorised parking by members of the public, which can block access to residents' garages. It was felt that more notices were required to stop non authorised parking

Landscaping - the benches provided for residents need cleaning and re-varnishing

and grass cutting is only done once or twice a year.

FS Response: I am waiting for a reply from a community service to see if they can refurbish the benches. Grass cutting takes place approximately 10 times per annum.

Further feedback: FS advised that he had engaged with an external community service and that low-class offenders have been/will be involved with re-furbishing benches.

Service charges - no issues raised but residents would like to be updated on what service charges are and how much they are being charged for them

Smoking - the residents raised the issue of people sitting on their outside wall to smoke and then dropping cigarette butts on the ground. They particularly mentioned this being done by staff from another scheme and wondered if UDC could send a letter regarding this.

FS Response: Not sure who would we be spending a letter to? I would hope that none of my team would do this and without specifics I cannot directly address this but I will reiterate to all staff of the standards I expect.

Further feedback: GFS advised he was unsure of what he could do to influence or stop this behaviour as it is out of his control.

Laundry facilities - these were inspected and found to be very good. Residents did not raise any issues about these.

Window cleaning - residents reported this was done about twice a year.

FS Response: Quarterly

Additional Remarks - the socially active residents found it difficult to engage other residents in any UDC initiatives. They suggested this may be due to lack of interest by other residents along with frequent changes of tenancies. This makes it difficult to make newsletters interesting and relevant.

FS Response: This is probably true although we make every effort in encouraging residents from all schemes to interact with each other. We advertise these events (assuming we know about them) in our quarterly newsletter.

Alan Hasler House, Gt Dunmow

The TRP visiting member met with a number of residents who responded to the questions as shown below. Spot checks were also carried out as set out in the questions above.

Notice boards were checked and all relevant information relating to service standards was displayed. Information also displayed signposting where residents can get help if they require it. Recreational events were advertised plus when service providers such as hairdressers would be calling. The noticeboards were

found to be accessible and contained a range of information.

All doors were secure at the time of the visit and residents were happy with the level of security this provided.

The results of the 2018 Customer Service Survey were displayed on the notice board. Residents confirmed they had taken part in the survey and all expressed satisfaction with their tenancy.

The individual support plans are kept securely in the office. They are checked annually with residents to make sure they are up to date.

As set out in Q8 above, residents are aware they can either opt in or out of the care service. Concerns were expressed that the warden was not available over weekends, so that level of care diminishes, especially if someone fell ill or had an accident and were not able to reach the cord to call for help.

FS Response: If a resident falls ill and they do not have their pendant on them the risk is the same regardless of whether there is an officer on duty.

Further feedback: TRP agreed you can only encourage residents to wear their pendants to ensure their safety if they fall ill.

Entertainments and clubs were advertised on noticeboards so residents, if they are able and wish to do so, can socialise.

The warden is usually the first responder to emergency calls but Care Call has list of people to call in these circumstances and, where necessary, will send out emergency services.

Parking - there were a number of complaints about car parking, including not enough of it exacerbated by non-residents sometimes parking which causes difficulty for less mobile residents. Satnav directs people the wrong way which has caused problems for visitors. A photograph is attached showing the problem with car parking. **See appendix ?**

No reported problems with landscaping.

Service charges - these include water, sewage and electricity but not gardening, cleaning or other maintenance. Residents are provided with a yearly breakdown of charges, but some still seemed unsure what they were paying for or recall even having received a breakdown.

Smoking - there were no reported problems with smoking as residents either smoked in their own flats or outside away from outer doors

Laundry Facilities and Window Cleaning - no problems reported with laundry facilities and outside of windows cleaning quarterly.

Additional Remarks - lifts frequently break down which leaves non mobile residents

trapped in their flats, in one instance for two weeks.

Slow door closures not working efficiently which means doors slam causing noise nuisance.

FS Response: All issues like this would be reported to repairs.

Further feedback: Lighter weight doors are now being fitted as repairs are required.

All residents present asked for wet rooms to be fitted as many had difficulty getting into and out of baths. There are some communal showers but residents prefer the privacy of their own flats.

Fire signs and procedures have been updated following the Grenfell Tower disaster.

As residents present said they were happy with their warden.

Priors Wood Court, Takeley

A number of residents attended the meeting with two TRP members.

As with Alan Hasler House above, noticeboards were checked. Service standards as well as all information for help and assistance and social events were clearly displayed. A residents' committee is active and informs residents of any issues as well as social events and services. Some residents complained that, despite contacting various officers at UDC, they did not always get a reply, although they did not specify what issues they had raised.

Those present who have been resident in 2018 confirmed they had not taken part in the Customer Satisfaction Survey as they felt they had been making their views known for a considerable period of time but to no effect. Some, but not all, reported they were not happy with their tenancy.

All doors have a coded entry but residents said that sometimes people gain entry without this, probably by being let in by a resident. They confirmed that strangers had been found in the common room with no I.D. although it was later established that they were from the Water Company.

Concerns were expressed that the warden has to attend other facilities so is not always contactable and residents were fearful of being left for long periods of time without help in the event they cannot reach the help line.

FS Feedback: It is reiterated to all residents that a S.H.O. is contactable at all times during working hours.

Further feedback: FS stated that it appeared residents want an SHO on site 24 hours a day. He confirmed that this is not possible and could not be resourced.

One resident who had recently moved in had signed up to the "Bronze" level of care, but TRP members were aware that only one level of care is now available.

Agreed support plans - TRP members explained that these should be kept securely in the office and no-one had received or requested a copy of theirs.

FS Feedback: These are kept securely, the issue of residents having copies of the Sheltered Assessment Form was addressed in the 2016 review and the question is asked directly on the form.

Emergency calls and timely response to those - family is usually the first responder.

Independent person for residents - a resident confirmed he had asked a representative from Age UK to sit in with him for meetings with UDC officers.

Service charges - there was much concern about these as water is not included in the service charges which it seems to be with other schemes. The residents of the bungalows can use the Court's laundry and shower facilities, which increases water usage for the Court but the bungalows have individual water meters. They complained that they could not get a proper breakdown of the service charges nor were they satisfied with the reason why they have to pay separately for water and different charges seem to apply to different residents. The residents would prefer either separate water meters, or one for the whole building who had contacted the water company could then be shared equally by residents.

Further feedback: FS advised that he had contacted the water company regarding the service charges and had escalated the issue to Roz Millership too. Afinity water have refused to supply individual meters. He advised there is an option for residents to take their complaint to the Ombudsman. He advised that the bungalows get charged a percentage of water usage which is used in the community area on the scheme site.

Parking - this was a source of much discontent as parking is extremely limited although there are identified ordinary and disabled spaces at the front of the scheme. However, the remainder of the road now has yellow lines, which were being painted just as the TRP members were leaving. The TRP has since learnt that this was done as emergency service vehicles were unable to park and had raised this issue with UDC. Concern was expressed about shopping deliveries as, although there is parking to the rear, there is no buzzer on the door, so residents would not know when a delivery is being made.

Smoking - no problems

Laundry facilities - the actual machines are fine but residents were not happy as the facility is usually crowded as it is also used by the residents of the bungalows opposite. They are also confused by the facility booklet which states that laundry is free to Priors Wood residents but they say they pay for this in their service charge.

Window cleaning - residents reported that this was done twice yearly.

FS Feedback: Quarterly.

Additional remarks - strong complaints made about the state of the carpets in the communal areas and stairs. They are worn and in places repaired with tape.

FS Feedback: Residents were all fully aware when the TRP visited that the carpets to the scheme were being replaced.

Further feedback: FS advised the carpets in question had all now been replaced.

Communal kitchen facilities also used by bungalow residents causing tension regarding cleaning, especially of the cooker. Also the cleaner's hours have been cut from three days per week to two.

FS Feedback: If the cooker requires cleaning then this is something we can arrange. I have not had any direct input with the cleaner's hours' being cut but the scheme is cleaned sufficiently.

Further feedback: FS advised that the cooker had now been cleaned and that he was engaging with the scheme and all other users with regards to the cleanliness of the facilities.

Alexia House, Gt Dunmow

As it had been two weeks since letters were sent out to residents, very few attended the meeting with TRP members.

Similarly to the above schemes, noticeboards had a copy of service standards, along with useful information and details of social activities. There is an active residents' committee and, alongside noticeboards, residents are kept informed at regular coffee mornings/afternoons, Friday lunch outings and fish and chip nights in the common room

It was noted that there was a problem with the front door not always locking closed.

FS Feedback: This is correct and was reported to repairs when there is an issue. This was raised with repairs asking for an inspection to have them replaced, this was agreed and we are waiting for the work to commence for new front doors. I will chase this up.

Further feedback: FS advised that there had been problems with the doors a this scheme and that the front door needs replacing. He confirmed this is currently being progressed.

There were no issues raised regarding any other questions on the questionnaire and residents spoken to were aware of the agreed support plan.

Parking - although no residents raised an issue, it was noted by TRP members that this was extremely limited, although as the scheme is within a housing estate, it would not be easy to overcome this problem.

Landscaping - the garden area was attractive and it was noted that work had recently been carried out to make improvements and that work is ongoing, much being either sourced by residents themselves or resourced through the residents' committee funds.

FS Feedback: I asked UDC's Grounds Maintenance Team to pay special attention to the rear garden. Most of the improvements made would have been by them or a community payback team that the staff organise.

Laundry facilities - the TRP members inspected these and noted that new machines had been installed. Residents did not report any problems with access to the facilities.

No other issues were raised.

Additional comments - the warden had arranged for residents to use their Senior Citizen bus passes to pay for a minibus for their outings. Residents were much appreciative of this excellent initiative.

The Close, Hatfield Heath

Again, very few residents met with TRP members, although some were spoken to during a walk around the facility.

Noticeboards were inspected and contained all relevant information about service standards, signposting for emergencies and other issues and social activities.

It was a very hot day and it was noted that one of the outside doors was propped open with no evidence of an intruder alarm. Access could have been gained by an intruder and, due to the heat, some residents also had their front doors either open or ajar.

FS Feedback: Due to the layout of the scheme it would not be feasible to have all external doors linked to an intruder alert. We always encourage all residents to make sure doors are not propped open but this is impossible to monitor when staff are not on duty. Many residents choose to have their front doors open or unlocked. Although this is discouraged leaving their doors unlocked is their choice.

Further feedback: FS confirmed that although residents are advised not to, his officers cannot control or stop them propping doors open in extreme weather conditions.

No-one spoken to had raised any other issues.

Parking - this was plentiful and there did not seem to be any problems.

Landscaping - the garden area was well cared for and supplied with seating and shaded areas.

Laundry facilities - TRP members inspected these and noted that new machines had been installed and the facilities appeared good.

No other issues were raised regarding service charges, smoking or window cleaning.

Additional comments - those residents TRP members spoke to seemed happy with their facilities and did not raise any particular problems. Social activities were well organised and residents could choose to either join in or not.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Q.1 - Service Standards - these were all adequately displayed on noticeboards.
No recommendation for improvement

Q.2 - Kept fully informed - noticeboards kept up to date with information and events.
No recommendation for improvement

Q.3 - Safe from abuse - there were some issues with fire doors being propped open with no alarm and entrance doors not always closing properly which could allow intruders to enter the premises. Issues with workmen not always wearing ID badges and/or signing in.

*Recommend that maintenance checks be carried out on entrance and fire doors and residents be reminded not to leave any access or fire door propped open
Recommend that carpets be maintained so as not to cause a trip hazard*

FS Feedback: This is already in place. Entrance doors and trip hazards are checked on the monthly Premises Inspection Forms. Fire doors are checked weekly in line with testing the fire alarms. Residents are reminded not to prop doors open but this can only be policed when an S.H.O. is on duty.

Q.4 - Treated fairly - as this related to repairs it did not form part of this review

Q.5 - Independence of choice - results of the 2018 Customer Satisfaction Survey on noticeboards. No particular issues raised by residents.
No recommendation for improvement

Q.6 - Swift response - as this related to repairs it did not form part of this review

Q.7 - Out of hours response - residents spoken to were aware of their support plan. No particular issues raised by residents.
No recommendation for improvement

Q.8 - Level of care received - most residents spoken to were aware there was now only one level of care, although a new resident had signed up to bronze level.
Recommend that staff and residents are all aware of the level of care now provided so only one message is given out.

FS Feedback: One level of care has been in place since April 1st 2017. Everyone automatically receives a daily visit unless they have signed a disclaimer to opt out and receive either a weekly visit or no visit. The resident that you mentioned would have had to sign a disclaimer requesting that they do not want a daily visit.

Q.9 - Opportunities - all the schemes visited ran a range of social activities, including coffee mornings/afternoons, film nights, BBQs, lunches out, fish and chip nights. There were active residents committees in all facilities.
No recommendation for improvement

Q.10 - Agreed support plan - residents can have a copy of this if they want but general practice is to retain safely in the scheme office. Officers confirmed the current IT system is not able to provide copies to all residents.
No recommendation for improvement

Q.11 - Emergency calls - Carecall send details of all emergency calls to Fergus Simmonds and details are on the noticeboards.
Recommend that details could also be included annually in Tenants' Newsletter

FS Feedback: Agreed that this is something we could consider. Although I would only consider publishing times for call monitoring and response. It is not relevant as to how many emergencies they have attended to and certainly not where.

Q.12 - Timely response to calls - residents did not raise any particular issues. Details of any calls form part of the monthly Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and are kept under review by officers.
No recommendation for improvement

Additional Questions:

Literature published by the Council - no issues raised by residents.
No recommendation for improvement

Noticeboards - all schemes had several in communal areas easily accessed by all residents who are able.
No recommendation for improvement

Parking - this was a bone of contention in several of the schemes with parking being very limited as evidenced by the attached photo. It is not easy to see how this could be overcome as some schemes are within housing developments so there is little scope for extending any parking.
Recommend that staff investigate how they can prevent non- residents using parking spaces provided either for residents or their visitors.
Recommend that staff carry out a review of all schemes and advise tenants of their rights regarding car parking.

FS Feedback: This is on-going at most sites and something that we have considered and improved where possible. Vicarage mead and Priorswood Court have had additional parking put in place and you have rightly noted that at some

schemes like Alexia House we do not have the facility to improve or increase parking. Residents are constantly made aware as to their parking rights and what if any action can be taken with regards to non-residents parking. Visitors have the right to park in sheltered bays but where possible we have encouraged them to park elsewhere, at Vicarage Mead we have actively encouraged all staff and able bodied visitors to park in Margaret Street car park and have provided details to residents at Priorswood Court of how to report rogue airport parkers.

Further feedback: *FS advised that ECC have been consulted regarding double yellow lines being installed at some schemes to help with parking issues. He explained that on-going issues were also reliant on residents obeying parking rules. A recent incident whereby emergency service vehicles had restricted access highlighted the case further.*

Landscaping - there are no issues raised at any of the schemes visited.
No recommendation for improvement

Service Charges - only one scheme raised an issue regarding service charges.
Recommend that those residents receive a full breakdown of their service charges and an explanation of why they pay separately for water charges which appear to be included in the service charges for other schemes.

FS Feedback: *This is in progress and discussions are taking place with utility providers and UDC officers. Once a decision has been made residents will be informed.*

Smoking - no issues were raised at any of the schemes visited. Smokers either smoked in their own premises or outside.
No recommendation for improvement

Independent person for tenants - no residents raised any issue where they felt they required anyone other than a family member to assist them, except the issue raised above.
No recommendation for improvement

Laundry facilities - these all seemed adequate with mainly new machines. Only one scheme raised an issue with access as the facilities were also available to occupants of the bungalows opposite.
Recommend that officers liaise with those residents and occupants of bungalows to achieve a rota for use.

FS Feedback: *Not required as laundry rooms are rarely busy. When we had this in place in previous years it just caused unnecessary conflict. Notices are placed in laundry rooms requesting residents to remove their laundry straight after use.*

Further feedback: *FS confirmed laundry facilities available at Priorswood from 8am – 8pm on a daily basis. He advised whenever he had visited the area was empty or available for use.*

Window cleaning - there were no issues raised although some schemes had their

windows cleaned more frequently than others.
Recommend that there is a common standard for all schemes.

FS Feedback: *Incorrect. All schemes are cleaned on a quarterly cycle.*

Additional Comments:

All residents spoken with at the five schemes highly praised their Warden who, despite their workload, seemed to go the extra mile for their residents.

There is concern that in some schemes social inclusion appears to be difficult perhaps due to frequent changes of tenancies or lack of interest in events planned.

The TRP members were disappointed at the low number of residents they actually spoke with, but took this as a sign that the majority were happy with the service they were receiving and their surroundings.

The TRP would like to take this opportunity of thanking UDC officers and all the residents they spoke with for their co-operation in this review.

Tenant Regulatory Panel

June 2019